

Healthy Hints: May 2013

National Physical Fitness and Sports Month

Making exercise and physical activity a regular part of your life can improve your health and help you maintain your independence as you age. Being physically active can also help you stay strong and fit enough to keep doing the things you like as you grow older.

One of the Healthiest Things You Can Do

Studies have shown that exercise provides many health benefits and that older adults can gain a lot by staying physically active. Moderate exercise and physical activity can improve the health of people who are frail or have diseases that may accompany aging.

Be As Active As Possible

Regular physical activity and exercise are important to the physical and mental health of almost everyone, including older adults. Older adults should aim to be as physically active as possible to reap the long-term health benefits.

Being Inactive Can Be Risky

Studies show “taking it easy” is risky. Lack of physical activity can lead to more visits to the doctor, more hospitalizations, and more use of medicines for a variety of diseases. When older people lose their ability to do things on their own, it’s usually because they are not active.

Prevent or Delay Disease

Regular exercise can prevent or delay many diseases and disabilities. It is an effective treatment for many chronic conditions. Studies show that exercise helps people with heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, high blood pressure, balance problems or difficulty walking.

Manage Stress and Improve Mood

Being active on a regular basis can help reduce stress and reduce feelings of depression. Studies also suggest that exercise can improve or maintain some aspects of cognitive function such as the ability to switch between tasks, plan an activity, and ignore irrelevant information.

Physical Activity or Exercise?

What is the difference between physical activity and exercise? Physical activities are activities that get your body moving like walking the dog or gardening. Exercise is a form of physical activity that is planned, structured, and repetitive such as weight training, tai chi, or an aerobics class. Try to include both in your life to feel better and enjoy life more as you age.

Make Exercise a Habit

Once you've started exercising, it is important to keep going because physical activity needs to be done on a regular basis to produce maximum benefits.

A Regular Part of Your Day

Set yourself up to succeed right from the start by seeking to make exercise a regular part of your day. When it becomes a normal part of your everyday routine, like brushing your teeth, you will be less apt to stop, and more likely to begin again if you are interrupted for some reason.

Make it a Priority

Many of us lead very busy lives and it's easy to put exercise at the bottom of our "to do" list. Remember though, that exercise is one of the most important things you can do to maintain and improve your health. Try to be active first thing in the morning and make it a point to include physical activities throughout the rest of the day. Put your time to exercise on your calendar and think of it as a special appointment.

Make it Easy

If it's difficult, inconvenient, or costs too much, you probably won't be active. You are more likely to exercise if it's easy to do. Find activities that you like and already know how to do. Walk the entire mall or every aisle of the grocery store. When you go out to get the mail, take a walk around the block. Go to a fitness center that is near your home. Put some weights next to your chair and try lifting them while you watch TV.

Make it Safe

Exercise and moderate physical activity are safe for almost all older adults. But avoiding injury is important, especially if you are starting a new activity or you haven't been active for a long time. Talk to your doctor if you have health problems and ask how physical activity can help you and if you should avoid any activities.

Make it Social

Enlist a friend or family member. Many people agree that having an "exercise buddy" keeps them going. Take a walk or an exercise class with your neighbor.

Make it Interesting and Fun

If you love the outdoors, try biking, jogging, or hiking. Listen to music or a book while walking or gardening. The goal is to be creative and choose exercises from each of the four categories—endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility. Mixing it up will help you reap the benefits of each type of exercise, as well as reduce boredom and the risk of injury. Seize opportunities and be active in many ways!

Source: www.nihseniorhealth.gov